

Message Text

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ACTION PM-05

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 ACDA-12 /099 W
-----128491 021158Z /47

R 020632Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7844
INFO AMEMBASSY DAKAR
USMISSION USUN
SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2477

E.OM 11652: XGDS-1,4
TAGS: MARR, SY, UN, LE
SUBJ: AIRLIFT OF UNIFIL CONTINGENT THROUGH DAMASCUS

REF: DAMASCUS 2384

1. AIRLIFT OF SENEGALESE UNIFIL CONTINGENT THROUGH DAMASCUS SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDED SUNDAY, APRIL 30. AIRLIFTY PROCEEDED WITHOUT A HITCH AND EMBASSY HAS NOTHING BUT HIGHEST PRAISE FOR EFFORTS OF SYRIAN OFFICIALS UNDER DIRECTION OF BRIGADIER MUHAMMAD KHOULI, UN OFFICIALS UNDER DIRECTION OF LT. COL. PHARAND (CANADA), ALCE TEAM, AND MAC AIRCRAFT COMMANDERS AND CREW. I HAVE REQUESTED APPOINTMENT WITH GENERAL KHOULI TO EXPRESS OUR THANKS AND DEPARTMENT MAY WANT TO CONSIDER IF MORE FORMAL EXPRESSION OF USG APPRECIATION WOULD BE APPROPRIATE.

2. UNDOF COMMANDER GENERAL PHILIP TOLD POLOFF THAT PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD HAD ORDERED SYRIAN AGREEMENT TO AIRLIFT THROUGH DAMASCUS AS EXPRESSION OF GOODWILL TOWARD USG TO DEMONSTRATE SYRIA'S COMMITMENT TO UNIFIL OPERATION. SYRIAN SECURITY OFFICIALS HAITHAM SAID (WHO HANDLES SPECIAL SECURITY ASSIGNMENT FOR KHOULI) CONFIDENTIAL

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AND ADNAN BARNEA (KHOULI'S AIDE DE CAMP RESPONSIBLE FOR LIAISON WITH PRESIDENT) TOLD POLOFF THAT PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD PERSONALLY ASSIGNED THEM RESPONSIBILITY UNDER GENERAL KHOULI TO ENSURE THAT AIRLIFT WAS COMPLETELY SUCCESSFUL. PRESIDENT WANTED TO DEMONSTRATE TO USG SYRIA'S COMPETENCE AND, THROUGH CLOSE COORDINATION WITH US EMBASSY, HIGH ESTEEM PRESIDENT HOLD FOR US IN GENERAL AND IN PARTICULAR FOR US EFFORTS IN LEBANON.

3. TOTAL AUTHORITY WIELDED BY HAITHAM SAID DURING COURSE OF AIRLIFT WAS RARE DEPARTURE FROM NORMAL SYRIAN BUREAUCRACY. HE WAS ABLE TO MAKE ALL DECISIONS ON THE SPOT WITHOUT REFERENCE TO HIGHER AUTHORITY AND HIS ORDERS WERE OBEYED INSTANTLY BY ALL OFFICIALS REGARDLESS OF THEIR POSITION IN CIVIL AVIATION, MILITARY POLICE, CUSTOMS, ETC. AS SAID TOLD POLOFF, TWO MEN RUN SYRIAN, PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD AND BRIGADIER KHOULI. HE QUIPPED THAT NAJI HAMIL HAD LEARNED THIS THE HARD WAY.

4. UN PORTION OF OPERATION WAS HANDLED SMOOTHLY WHICH WAS TESTIMONY TO COL PHARAND'S ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITY, IN SPITE OF MULTIPLE LINES OF UN AUTHORITY WHICH COMPLICATE EVEN SIMPLEST MOVEMENTS.

5. BELIEVE SYRIANS WERE IMPRESSED WITH US AIRLIFT CAPABILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND MANAGEMENT OF OPERATIONS, ALTHOUGH COMMUNICATION RE AIRCRAFT ETA'S WERE GENERALLY MORE ACCURATE AND TIMELY THROUGH SYRIAN CHANNELS THAN THROUGH US CHANNELS. SYRIANS RELIED EXTENSIVELY ON EMBASSY FOR COORDINATION AT WORKING LEVEL WITH ALL NON-SYRIAN ELEMENTS OF OPERATION INCLUDING UN. THIS DUE INPART TO ABSENCE OF ARABIC SPEAKING UN LIAISON DURING EARLY STAGES OF AIRLIFT.

6. EMBASSY INVITATIONS TO AIR FORCE COMMANDER AND STAFF FOR TOUR OF AIRCRAFT WERE TAKEN UP AS REPORTED REFTEL. INVITA-
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TIONS TO MINDEF TLASS, COS SHIHABI, ET AL, HOWEVER, WERE IGNORED. WHEN I MENTIONED INVITATION TO TLASS EVENING OF APRIL 26 AT A RECEPTION, HE FEIGNED IGNORANCE AND CHANGED SUBJECT. TLASS, WHO HAS BEEN CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH PROCUREMENT OF SOVIET ARMS WAS CLEARLY NOT AUTHORIZED TO IDENTIFY IN ANY WAY WITH AIRLIFT. THIS CONSISTENT WITH TOTAL NEWS BLACKOUT PLACED ON AIRLIFT. PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD WAS APPRENTLY INTERESTED IN SENDING US PRIVATE MESSAGE RE BILATERAL RELATIONS AND UNIFIL BUT DID NOT WANT TO ENGAGE IN PUBLIC EMBRACE. NEVERTHELESS, BELIEVE OUR OBJECTIVES IN ASKING SYRIANS TO PERMIT AIRLIFT THROUGH DAMASCUS HAVE BEEN FULLY MET IN TERMS OF TYING SYRIANS MORE CLOSELY TO UNIFIL AND IN BOOSTERING BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY AIRLIFTS, INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978DAMASC02477
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: DC ALSO X1
Executive Order: X4
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780186-0757
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197805103/aaaadkff.tel
Line Count: 108
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d247d593-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION PM
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 DAMASCUS 2384
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2523500
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AIRLIFT OF UNIFIL CONTINGENT THROUGH DAMASCUS
TAGS: MARR, SY, LE, SG, UN, UNIFIL
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d247d593-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014